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**Community Sport Clubs Perceptions on High Performance Sport Pathways**

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## **Abstract**

Understanding the influence and contribution of community sport clubs to High performance sport pathways gives opportunity to improve the pathways effectiveness and facilitation. This research investigates the perceptions of community sport clubs in relation to HP sport pathways. It seeks to gain a greater understanding of the early stages of elite athlete development, from the perspective of the community sport sector.

The research followed a mixed methods approach to achieve the research aim of investigating the sport club perceptions of prioritisation, facilitation, and accessibility of high performance (HP) pathways. Data for this study was collected via inclusion of scaled and open ended questions into the National Sport Club Survey (NSCS).

Many club representatives are of the opinion that there is still a divide between the higher-level organisations and their clubs. The responses, and previous research surrounding this topic, highlights the importance of good communication and collaboration between all levels of the sport organisational structure to promote optimal provision of HP sport pathways. Additionally, findings from this study suggest that the presence of qualified coaches within community sports clubs is important to support access to HP sport pathways, by increasing inter-level communication.

This research adds value to the sports industry through understanding the sentiments of the community sport club role in the implementation of HP pathways across all levels of sport. Their voice gives valuable insight that can inform decision making related to HP sport pathways. Furthermore, this study will be useful in providing a platform for further research in this area to extend benefit to all levels of sport in New Zealand.

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### **Attestation of Authorship**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Student's Signature: Daniel Martin

Date: 6 May 2022

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Sport is a fundamental part of New Zealand culture, encompassing from the community level sport that many New Zealanders participate in, to the accomplishments of high performance (HP) athletes (Sport New Zealand, n.d.). The foundation of New Zealand's sport system are the community sport clubs, who provide their communities with the opportunities to participate in sporting activities. The clubs provide the first step to HP sport pathways which support an athlete's progress towards elite levels in their sport. Understanding the influence and contribution of community sport clubs to their HP sport pathway gives opportunity to improve their effectiveness and facilitation. This research investigates the perceptions of community sport clubs relating to HP sport pathways and seeks to gain a greater understanding of the early stages of the nation's elite athlete development, from the perspective of the community sport sector.

### **1.1 Background to Research**

An HP sport pathway is a system for athletes to develop and reach their full potential. Effective pathways attract and retain athletes, as well as ease the transition to the highest levels of sport (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2013). Having a structured HP sport pathway is critical for the future success of a sport, as they help move an athlete from one level to the next in order to achieve their potential (Green, 2005). If there are robust systems within a sport that help athletes who have the talent and motivation to reach their full potential, this leads to overall success in sport at the elite level (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). Research has shown that pathways with set developmental phases enable the provider to identify the support needed and then provide it in the right way, and at the correct time (Balyi et al., 2013). An HP sport pathway ensures that athletes have the opportunity to receive the support needed in their development, thereby increasing their chance of achieving their potential.

Despite widespread research highlighting the need for HP pathways (Asselstine & Edwards, 2019; Ogden & Edwards, 2016; Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2013), HP sport is often a separate system from community sport. Whilst community sport clubs predominantly focus on encouraging participation, elite sport is driven by performance targets and resource prioritisation (Kitching & Campbell, 2019). This

disconnect can lead to clubs being overlooked in the development and implementation of HP sport strategies (Lowther et al., 2016). Often community sport clubs are unaware of HP sport policies and targets due to lack of communication between national, regional and club levels (Sotiriadou et al., 2017). This can result in community sport clubs lacking the proper facilities, programmes, training or financial capabilities to provide the needed structure to aid in providing athletes with effective pathways (Millar et al., 2020).

Relationships between community sport clubs and Regional Sport Organisations (RSOs) or National Sport Organisations (NSOs) are an important aspect of HP sport pathways. Good relationships and clear communication enable coaches and staff to upskill, and ultimately provide a better development programme for athletes (Sotiriadou et al., 2017). However, further study into how these partnerships contribute to pathways and talent progression has not been widely researched (Bloyce et al., 2008; Sotiriadou, 2009; Sotiriadou et al., 2017). Of the research that has taken place, it has been noted that government funding for HP is provided directly to the NSOs, with very little of this funding filtered down to club level (Sotiriadou, 2009). This means that community sport clubs are unable to provide opportunities and accessibility to talented athletes directly (Bloyce et al., 2008).

The implementation of HP sport pathways has been the focus of much national and international research. This research has analysed models and policies that have been developed to maximise the progress of athletes towards the elite level (Brouwers et al., 2015). These studies have investigated such areas as the importance of governmental funding on HP sport, and the impact of early specialisation on athletes' development.

Community sport clubs have had significant research focused on their contribution to sport. Aside from investigating their main focus of providing community sporting opportunities, research has also focused on the benefits to lifestyle, national culture and local communities that the community sport clubs contribute to. However, community sport clubs also provide the foundation of HP sport pathways, and the perceptions regarding this is an important resource that can aid in better facilitation of these pathways.

As a key component of developing elite athletes, gaining a better understanding of the systems and policies that aid athlete development is important for NSOs and HP sport organisations. The concept of the HP sport pathways and the roles organisations have in them, have been well researched, (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2013, Ford et al., 2011; Lloyd et al., 2015; Norris, 2010) however very little has explored the perspective of the community sport clubs themselves. This gives opportunity for this research to benefit the HP sport pathways by investigating New Zealand's community club level involvement in supporting and providing HP sport pathways.

## **1.2 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to investigate New Zealand's community sport club level involvement in supporting and providing HP sport pathways. As community sport clubs are the first step in an athlete's pathway to elite sport, there is a need to better understand their perspective on their role in the HP sport pathway system. This research focuses on community sport club perceptions of the prioritisation, facilitation, and accessibility of these pathways, an area as of yet not covered in related literature. This research will also add value to the sports industry in terms of how best to develop and implement HP pathway across all levels of their sport (Cuskelly et al., 2006).

## **1.3 Research Aim**

The aim of the research is to gain knowledge into the perceptions of community sport club stakeholders on the provision and support of HP sport pathways in New Zealand. This research was conducted through use of a questionnaire which explored participants sentiments regarding the influence of community sport clubs' provision of HP sport pathways.

## **1.4 Methodology**

As there was little known about the perceptions of community sport clubs on HP sport pathways, a thorough and explorative method was required leading to the adoption of a mixed methods approach. A large sample of data for this research was gained though the inclusion of scaled and open-ended questions to the National Sport Clubs Survey.

Key sentiments that were gathered from the questionnaire focused on community sport clubs prioritisation, accessibility, resource capability and organisational relationships associated with HP sport pathways. This provided an insight into where community sport clubs perceive there to be positives and limitations on the current state of New Zealand's' HP sport pathways. This study will provide the sport organisations in charge of the pathways in HP sport, a lens to examine the state of these systems, from the viewpoint of the community sport clubs.

### **1.5 Research Structure**

Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the overall study conducted. Chapter 2 is a literature review covering current research pertaining to community sport clubs and HP sport pathways. Chapter 3 describes the methods and methodology of the research. Chapter 4 reports the results of the scaled and open ended questions. Chapter 5 provides a discussion on the interpretation of the findings, whilst also outlining the implications of the research, the limitations of the study, future areas of research and a final conclusion.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter explores the current literature related to community sport clubs and high performance (HP) sport pathways. A specific focus is the intersection between community sport clubs and the governing bodies within those pathways. HP sport is an important component of the sport industry as it is the system through which athletes receive support and funding to assist them in reaching their potential (Sotiriadou & De Bosscher, 2013). HP sport pathways provide the structure that supports talented athletes, giving direction in their journey towards an elite level (Sotiriadou et al., 2016). Community sport provides a platform for athletes to progress into HP sport pathways. The opportunities community sport clubs offer can help advance athletes' skill development, but also foster passion and a sense of community (Galatti et al., 2016).

Despite the importance of community sport clubs as the foundation of HP sport pathways, there is very little research that explores this relationship (Asselstine & Edwards, 2019; Bloyce et al., 2008; Ogden & Edwards, 2016; Sotiriadou, 2009; Sotiriadou et al., 2017; Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2013). Furthermore, the perspectives of community sport clubs regarding HP pathways has not yet been explored in detail. Community sport clubs are crucial to an athlete's development, and those within the clubs have valuable insight into what is needed to facilitate effective and efficient HP pathways (Millar, Clutterbuck, & Doherty, 2020). Therefore, it is important to broaden our understanding of the role that community sport clubs play in HP sport pathways, which can be undertaken by capturing the perspectives of community sport clubs representatives.

### **2.1 Community Sport Clubs**

In many countries, community sport clubs are the most common type of organisation in the non-profit and voluntary sector (Doherty et al., 2014; Hoye & Doherty, 2011). They provide accessible and affordable opportunities for participation in organised sport (Robertson et al., 2019). Their non-profit structure influences operations. Clubs are often financially limited but well resourced with volunteer human capital (Doherty et al., 2014). By understanding the perspective of community sport clubs in the delivery of sport, a greater knowledge of where the clubs require support with regard to HP pathways will result (Robertson et al., 2019).

A community sport club's primary aim is to provide sporting opportunities to the local community by offering both recreational and competitive sport in a manner that is accessible (Doherty & Misener, 2008; Sharpe, 2006). This is achieved by creating a sporting environment characterised by flexibility and affordability, featuring multiple teams and levels of play (i.e. masters, youth, seniors, men and women) (Finch & Donaldson, 2010). Community sport clubs can also facilitate skill development, which may lead an athlete into HP sport pathways (Skille, 2010).

A multi-layered federated network of organisations is a common governance system in sport (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Hoye & Doherty, 2011). Community sport clubs form the foundation of sport within the national governance sporting structure, and have a primary function of providing community sporting opportunities (Doherty et al., 2014; Doherty & Cousens, 2013; Hoye & Doherty, 2011). The next level of the structure are regional sport organisations (RSO) who govern the delivery of sport within their region, and interact with the clubs as a governing authority. The apex of the structure is formed by national sport organisations (NSO), who provide leadership at a national level. The primary role of NSOs is to govern the delivery of sport and align the RSOs under their governance (Reid, 2012). NSOs, RSOs and clubs together form a sport structure that facilitates participation and athlete development.

As they are the base of the sport system, community sport clubs focus primarily on participation and community involvement. However, community sport clubs also contribute to their community by promoting awareness of health and wellbeing. It is well known that sport is beneficial to the health and wellbeing of its participants, making it a valuable part of society (Khan, 2012). Physical activity provides participants with health benefits such as cardiovascular fitness, weight loss, and physical strength (Kokko et al., 2015). As the prominent providers of sport in communities, community sport clubs have an important role in the promotion of healthier lifestyles. In addition to nurturing physical fitness, clubs often participate in health and wellbeing initiatives such as the promotion of sun protection, nutritional advice, smoke-free campaigns and responsible alcohol behaviour (Robertson et al., 2019). These initiatives are sometimes carried out in association with external health promoters, but often policy and strategic planning are driven internally from within the club (Kokko et al., 2006). The strong connection between healthy living and sport

makes the community sport club a cornerstone for collaborative health advancement. Community clubs then need to balance their health and wellbeing commitments, with providing assistance to their members, in terms of HP sport opportunities.

The promotion of healthier lifestyles, in tandem with the provision of sport, strengthens the community sport clubs standing within communities. There is a societal belief that community sports clubs initiate the change that is needed in order to address many social problems within communities (Okayasu et al., 2010). Central to this belief is the association between sport and social capital. Social capital is a concept describing the social networks that are created when individuals and groups interact (Skinner et al., 2008). These networks promote effective functioning through such concepts as a common identity, understanding, and shared trust (Okayasu et al., 2010, Skinner et al., 2008, Zakus et al., 2009). Community sport clubs can offer the necessary positive environment to foster social capital because of the common virtues such as respect for rules, self confidence, diversity, teamwork and methods of practices often associated with them (Robertson et al., 2018). Association with a club has been seen to promote a sense of pride and unity amongst the members, and this is especially apparent in smaller organisations (Skinner et al., 2008, Tonts, 2005). This results in strong social capital gained from the connection of people and the creation of a safe and supportive environment.

The benefits of strong social capital in a community sport club relates to improvement in the mental health of participants. Recent research found that the social support which arises from interaction with other members in team sports, has been seen as a safe guard to wellbeing (Robertson et al., 2018). Mental health disorders comprise of 45% of diseases that burden youth aged from 10 to 24 years of age, making it a pressing concern in New Zealand's society (Ministry of Health, 2019). As the majority of community sport club members are youth and adolescents, clubs are ideally positioned to offer mental health support to this vulnerable demographic (Hurley et al., 2017). Many community sport clubs promote psychological wellbeing through participation in mental health campaigns run by outside organisations, and by training staff in the provision of mental health support. This training is very beneficial to coaches in particular, as it resources them better to assist athletes (Pierce, 2010). Although the support of psychological

wellbeing is not the primary role of community sport clubs, it is an important function which is becoming increasingly important. This support includes the strain on an athlete's professional and personal life when they begin to aim to transition into high performance sport. This assistance extends to those within their club through support of athletes and staff, and also to their local community by provision of wellness education and sporting opportunity (Bradley et al., 2013).

Sport brings together people from many different backgrounds and diverse communities. This characteristic is enhanced by the reliance of the clubs on volunteers who are an essential element of the community sports clubs. Volunteers often contribute to community sport clubs because they are passionate about a sport, and this passion enriches the sense of community, further strengthening a club's social capital (Frost et al., 2013). The use of volunteers, often in facilitator roles, also allows clubs to remain operational as non-profit organisations, and helps them provide lower cost sport opportunities for their members.

Community sport clubs are non-profit organisations, reliant on the input of volunteer human resources (Misener & Doherty, 2009). These volunteers are often sourced from club members and their families, or former athletes from the local area. Especially when aiming to provide athletes with the coaching and management necessary to reach high performance sport, finding experienced human resources is hard for community sport clubs with limited financial resources. Volunteers with the knowledge and experience to train and guide athletes in elite sport are often a precious commodity to community sport clubs. Regardless of where they come from, it is notable that their commitment to the club is an asset that contributes to positive experiences for members (Brouwers et al., 2015).

Voluntary human resources are the backbone of community sports clubs. However, this can come at the cost of limited relevant qualifications they are usually able to offer (Griffiths & Armour, 2014). A lack of relevant qualification can be offset by assets such as skills in areas of leadership, attitude, and coaching (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Most community sport clubs provide valuable community sport opportunities within these limitations. However, when athletes wish to move into HP areas of sport and require the initiation of policies and new systems, a lack of relevant qualification may prove to be a hindrance to their progression (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

The reliance and retention of a volunteer workforce is an additional challenge for community sport clubs. Volunteers often have many other priorities which affect the time they are able to commit to a club. This has to be managed effectively by the club in order to promote a stable working environment that encourages a consistent standard (Griffiths & Armour, 2014). Finding volunteers with the desired skills and qualifications can be difficult, and this is especially apparent as community sport clubs expand and grow. Volunteers with the skills and qualifications to provide the services required to get athletes ready for high performance sport is especially hard difficult for community clubs to acquire. With limited personnel, clubs often rely on the human resources they have, which can result in the overworking of volunteers leading to resignations (Griffiths & Armour, 2014). Understanding that their service must be of value to the volunteer, is key to retaining them and acknowledgement of the worth of their role can enhance the value of their contribution. This acknowledgment can be supported through the investment of training and effective leadership, which shows a volunteer that they are appreciated, thus promoting retention (Misener & Doherty, 2009).

Community sport clubs are an integral part of the delivery of sport and well-being in New Zealand. They unite diverse groups of people promoting strong social capital, which is enriched by the contribution of volunteers. By appreciating the perspective of community sport clubs and the myriad of functions they serve, NSO support can be structured to enhance the valuable contribution of the community sport clubs (Doherty et al., 2014; Doherty & Cousens, 2013; Hoye & Doherty, 2011; Robertson et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important that the voice of community sport clubs is heard, and their role within the HP sport pathways understood, in order to facilitate targeted support.

## **2.2 Organisational Capacity of Clubs**

As important entities in the facilitation of sport, the factors which contribute to community sport clubs achieving their aims is vital. Community sport clubs largely operate as non-profit entities, which affects their organisational capacity.

Organisational capacity refers to the degree to which an organisation is able to resource the capital necessary in order to effectively achieve its goals (Breuer et al., 2021). It is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses various areas of capacity in an organisation such as financial, human resources and relationship

capacity (Sharpe, 2006). The non-profit nature of community sport clubs impacts their organisational capacity, influencing decision making in the formulation of systems and policies (Misener & Doherty, 2009). In order to continue to operate in a secure and efficient manner, a club must understand their capabilities. This benefits not only the club themselves, but also the organisations responsible for developing policies and systems which affect community sport clubs (Doherty & Cuskelly, 2019). Clubs must carefully examine their organisational capacity so that they can successfully sustain the distribution of sporting opportunities to their community (Balduck et al., 2015). By understanding their organisational capacity community sport clubs can then engage to the best of their abilities within HP pathways.

Financial capacity describes a club's ability to grow and utilise financial capital (i.e. an organisations revenue, expenses, assets and liabilities). Additionally, the financial capacity of a club refers to the ability to engage in responsible finance management, such as managing costs, efficient book keeping and the transfer of cash in and out of the club (Doherty & Cuskelly, 2019). Because the majority of a community sports clubs income is derived from membership fees, clubs are often limited in their financial capacity (Sharpe, 2006). As community sport clubs primary aim is to provide 'sport for all', membership fees are based on the costs needed to cover the clubs ability to facilitate these opportunities. Increasing membership costs to provide for HP sport, or growing the club, may put financial pressure on potential members (Doherty & Cuskelly, 2019). This financial challenge emphasises the importance that responsible fiscal management plays in the management of a club. The financial capacity of the community sport club will influence their ability to provide HP sport pathways (Winand, et al., 2012). Given that the financial resources needed to assist athletes to reach the HP sport pathways will need to be shared with the community sport clubs other responsibilities.

Another dimension of organisational capacity related to community sport clubs are their human resources. Human capacity describes an organisation's ability to deploy human capital within the organisation. Human capital encompasses the staff and volunteers of an organisation, in addition to intangible capital such as their knowledge, motivation and behaviours (Balduck et al., 2015). The intangible aspects of human capital are particularly important to community

sport clubs, because of the large proportion of volunteers in club management, coaching and administration roles (Sharpe, 2006). It is therefore important that investment is made in this area, and a significant way that community sport clubs can achieve this is through upskilling their staff, in particular their coaches (Breuer et al., 2021). As community sport clubs seek to support their athletes development and transition to HP levels, coaches play an important role in this progression. Qualified coaches are a valuable commodity providing benefit to sport at every level, and by supporting a higher quality of coaching, HP athletic development is aided (Misener & Danylchuk, 2009). Community sport club coaches are predominantly volunteers, without coaching qualifications. Therefore, the task of finding volunteers capable of offering coaching of a high level can be challenging. Qualified coaches usually already coach professionally at a high level, and thus are unable to spare time to also coach in a voluntary role (Edwards & Washington, 2013; Misener & Danylchuk, 2009). By supporting community sport clubs through resourcing the upskilling of their staff, and in particular their volunteer coaches, the human capital of the club will be enhanced as well as the strengthening of HP pathways (Breuer, et al., 2021).

The ability of an organisation to make use of stakeholder relationships in order to share resources, knowledge and experience is a key component of organisational capacity (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Key stakeholders for community sport clubs are their RSOs and NSOs, as well as funders (Balduck et al., 2015). As community sport clubs often lack qualified or professional human capacity, by having beneficial relationships they are able to address challenges in areas where they lack expertise.

Organisations need to nurture their capacity in order to be able to adapt and grow. This may be in response to environmental change, or through the development of new situations which require them to modify their organisational approach (Hanlon et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important that an organisation maintains the readiness which enables them to build this capacity effectively. The process that is required to undertake the building and then maintenance of these efforts is resource intensive and relies on the current club capacity to achieve a positive outcome in both the short and long term (Millar & Doherty, 2016). This ability to adapt organisational capacity in order optimally enhance a club can be

supported by the mutually beneficial relationships that they develop with organisations outside the club.

The community sport clubs generate strong social capital, and are positioned as the foundation for sport. This in turn allows them the opportunity to positively influence HP sport through the incorporation of their voice into the facilitation of HP sport pathways. Therefore, it is vital to include community sport clubs into the conversation of national sport systems. Their role in providing sport to communities is important to the future of sport both at a recreational level, as well as at the HP level (Pankhurst, 2013). Community sport clubs have to balance the priorities of both sport participation and HP sport opportunities (Ferkins & Bottenburg, 2013). They are the foundation of sport, and if there is a disconnect between the ground level and the HP levels, instability and lack of optimal performance may result. By understanding the organisational capacity of community sport clubs, a clearer picture can be seen of how HP sport pathways can be best provided.

### **2.3 High Performance Sport**

Engagement in sport can be separated into two distinct categories; participatory and HP sport. Participation focused engagement in sport tends to be less serious and more recreational (Sherry, Schulenkorf, & Phillips, 2016). In contrast, HP sport is generally competitive, featuring layers of funding and policy administration. Participants are often provided a platform from which they can develop in their sport at club level, with the goal of competing nationally and internationally (Farrow & Robertson, 2017). Athletes that are targeted for HP sport are usually participants who have shown the potential to achieve success in their sport. Ultimately the aim in HP sport is to succeed at the highest level, and this requires sports to develop systems and structures, known as HP pathways, in order to support their athletes to succeed at the elite levels (Gowthorp et al., 2017).

Having a successful HP sport system exerts a positive influence within a nation's cultural, political and economical arenas (Gowthorp et al., 2017). Sport, due to high profile competitions on a national and international scale, has developed over the years into a phenomenon which can embed into a nation's culture and identity (De Rycke & De Bosscher, 2019). Therefore, HP sport, and the accomplishments that can be achieved through it, can be hugely influential towards

a country's social capital (Grix & Carmichael, 2012). People perceive athletes and national teams as representatives of their nations, which engenders a sense of pride when success is achieved. Major international sporting events such as the Olympics, World Cups and international championships give communities a rallying point, and enhance a sense of community and worth (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). The benefits gained from HP sport make it an area that is seen to deserve national prioritisation and subsequent government funding.

By raising the profile of sport as a desirable and worthwhile achievement, communities are encouraged to participate in a healthier and more active lifestyle (De Bosscher et al., 2013). The encouragement of mass participation in sport is another reason that investment in HP is justified (Farrow & Robertson, 2017). Therefore, governmental support for HP in sport crucial if a nation is to remain competitive and garner the benefits associated with successful sporting endeavours in the world of sport (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). This can only happen if there are robust systems available to athletes who have the talent and motivation to reach their full potential (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009).

## **2.4 High Performance Pathways**

HP sport is focused on developing and implementing sporting practices at the highest level (Brouwers et al., 2015). The benefits generated by HP sport at a national level have led to the development of government funded HP pathways. A HP pathway is a system that supports athletes to develop, and reach their full potential. Effective pathways attract and retain athletes, easing the transition to the highest levels of sport (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2013). HP pathways are important to the future of sport, as success at the elite level attracts potential participants (Green, 2005).

National Sport Organisations (NSOs) and Regional Sport Organisations (RSOs) are integral to the creation and implementation of HP pathways (Sotiriadou et al., 2017). They provide guidance and investment into HP sport pathways and identify the needs of the sport in their governance. It is important that development of athletes from the base of the community sport clubs to the pinnacle of the elite levels be kept at the forefront of the decision making as HP sport pathway models are formed (Brouwers et al., 2015).

HP sport pathways are dynamic systems that are used to identify talented participants and maximising their natural progression as an athlete, assisting them in their evolution towards the elite level of sport (Ford et al., 2011). The policies and processes that are implemented, to provide effective pathway models for athletes, are crucial to success in HP sport, and understanding the nature of HP athletes development underpins their shaping (Sotiriadou et al., 2016).

Research has shown that pathways, with set developmental phases, enable the provider to identify the support needed and then provide it in the right way and at the correct time (Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013). A HP pathway ensures that athletes have the opportunity to receive the needed support in their development, thereby increasing their chance of achieving success.

## **2.5 High Performance Pathway Models**

Over many years, sport managers and academics have put forth a variety of HP sport pathway models. These models are helpful as they provide an overarching system that can be used to understand how HP sport pathways work best. Four of the most prevalent are the ARTN, Pyramid, SPLISS and LTAD models, which are described next. The use of a HP sport pathway model focuses support of athletes through development programmes built around athlete skill advancement and optimisation.

Within high performance sport development there is the Attraction, Recruitment, Retention/Transition, And Nuturing (ARTN) model (Green, 2007, Sotiriadou, 2013). The model focuses on the input, throughput and output properties of an organisation, which allows them to adapt in response to their individual characteristics (Sotiriadou, 2013).

The initial stage in the ARTN model focuses on attraction and recruitment processes (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou et al., 2008). It aims to discover future elite athletes through encouraging participation in sport, and can be characterised as a process more suited to community sport clubs. The increase in those participating in sport grows the potential pool of athletes who may continue to progress through to HP sport. In contrast, the recruitment processes within the initial stage of the ARTN model focuses on finding talented individuals to begin on HP pathways (Green, 2005). Once the athletes have been attracted or recruited, the next stage

progresses to identifying and developing those who show HP potential (Edwards, 2016).

The retention/transition process in the HP sport ARTN pathway identifies the most talented individuals and assists them in developing their progression to the elite levels. This is achieved through athlete retention, talent identification, and athlete transition (Sotiriadou et al., 2008). Retention places emphasis on maintaining the initial sport participation interest, and targets motivating influences that encourage continued participation in sport (Green, 2005). These participant motivators can be the excitement of sport, social interaction, learning new skills, a community feel, and wellbeing benefits, which are integral parts of a community club (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). Alternatively participants actively looking to progress into HP sport, find competitions, development programmes and specialised coaching motivating, and the provision of these increases the likelihood of their retention, this is where the HP pathways are of value (Sotiriadou et al., 2014).

Talent identification operates in tandem with talent transition processes, as only those athletes who are capable of progressing are identified and then transitioned (Brouwers et al., 2015). Identification of talent ensures the sports clubs efforts are focussed on identifying the most promising talents. From here the identified athletes are given the opportunity to be nurtured towards the elite level of their sport. Transition is the process of upskilling the participants in the HP pathways, with the intention of progressing them through the levels in competitive sport.

Once the athlete is at the HP level in sport, the nurturing processes should be in place to give an athlete the best chance possible to achieve success in national and international events and competitions, (Sotiriadou et al., 2008). Within this process provision of facilities, coaching and sport science research are made available to the identified athletes, to enable them to maintain their ability to succeed.

As sport has evolved, research has become increasingly focussed on investigating the best operation of HP pathways, and athlete development models have been developed to promote effective and efficient HP pathways. However, an early athlete development model that is still relevant today is the Pyramid Model. This model focuses on the relationships between participation and HP sport, and explains the different pathways that are present between the four levels of athlete

development (Green, 2005). At the base there is the foundation level, which is comprised of sport participants as they learn basic skills. This level is participation focused, where sport is primarily joined for leisure, fitness and social benefits. Performance follows participation, and this is where the athletes challenge themselves to improve and compete in their sport. Finally there is the excellence level, which represents the top of the pyramid, a level where athletes are achieving elite level performances in their sport. Once in this sport system, participants are able to move up and down the levels at their choosing and according to their ability and aspirations (Bramham et al., 2007). The Pyramid Model is reliant on the strong base of the foundation level community sport clubs, but it has been argued that its focus is on the apex of elite sport. It is important that in order for this model to work optimally each level is optimally resourced (De Bosscher et al., 2013).

The 'Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Success in Sport' (SPLISS) model is another tool developed as a way to explore contributory influences to international success in elite sport. It utilises an efficient and effective analysis of HP sport pathways to investigate how they achieve their sporting success. SPLISS highlights how and where effort should be maximised in the development of HP pathways (De Bosscher et al., 2006). It provides a framework to analyse the HP sport development pathways that countries have in place, as they seek to achieve success in elite sport (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Frequently governments, in an effort to achieve greater sporting success, have sought to do so through injecting considerable financial investment. For some countries this works, however this is not the case for others or may not be possible for smaller nations. The SPLISS model probes the influences policies have on sporting success, an area that had not previously been investigated in depth. SPLISS is made up of nine pillars of factors that are identified to be important in achieving elite sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2009). The factors that make up the SPLISS model are identified as being inputs financial support or throughputs governance, participation, talent development and identification, athlete support, training facilities, coach provision and development, national and international competition and scientific research.

SPLISS groups the factors influencing elite athlete development, categorising them as macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. The macro level

analysis focuses on cultural and social factors and the meso level analysis covers factors influenced by policy and strategic planning (De Bosscher et al., 2013). The meso level factors include allocation of resources, strategies and programmes and are managed by NSOs and government organisations directly to influence elite athlete development. Micro level analysis focuses on the factors which are in the athlete's direct environment, and which contribute to their development. These factors may include internal and external personal qualities, the coaches, and the training environment (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). The SPLISS model's efficient analysis of HP pathways makes it an important asset in the development of sport both nationally and internationally.

The Long Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) is a model which has been adopted and utilised by national governing bodies, with the core focus on the development of athletes from childhood through to the elite level (Ford et al., 2011; Lloyd et al., 2015; Norris, 2010). LTAD highlights the need to effectively train athletes in association with their development in sport and biological maturation. It takes advantage of the periods of an athlete's peak developmental years by promoting sport specialisation at a young age, with the aim of increasing the chance of them reaching their full athletic potential earlier in their career, and for a longer sustained period (Ford et al., 2011).

Athlete development is a complex and changing concept, with variables that are to be considered fluid and dynamic (Green, 2007). In New Zealand, HP sport is highly valued, which has meant significant focus is put on developing efficient and effective HP pathways. There might not be one right answer, but by gaining an in depth view of what contributes to HP pathways, an overall advancement of sport can be promoted.

## **2.6 High Performance Sport in New Zealand**

Sport is considered an integral part of New Zealand's cultural identity which is strengthened by the success that has been attained on the international sporting stage (High Performance Sport New Zealand, 2021). HP sport provides positive international exposure for New Zealand and brings communities together. It increases interest in sport, and inspires those in sport to succeed. High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) provides funding nationally across

sports to promote opportunity for athletes to be able attain, and perform, at the elite level (HPSNZ, 2021).

In New Zealand, the NSO's manage their own pathway of HP sport, and HPSNZ coordinates with each NSO (Gowthorp et al., 2017). The New Zealand Government provides funding for the HP pathways through HPSNZ to promote and support quality sport experiences for all New Zealanders (Sport New Zealand, n.d.). HPSNZ's aim is to provide athletes, coaches, and support staff, with the pathways through which they can rise to perform at the elite level in their sport (Sport New Zealand, n.d.). The importance of HP sport to New Zealand motivates HPSNZ to continue to improve in their delivery of support to HP athletes and staff. This can be seen in their recent strategic planning prioritisation of funding, wellbeing, and HP pathways (HPSNZ, 2021).

A significant aspect of the HPSNZ funding can be seen in the breadth of its provision. As well as being used for HP sport initiatives and pathways, HPSNZ also provide investment directly to athletes to provide financial security. Financial insecurity can be a barrier to achieving success in elite level sport, as the pressure of financial worry can limit athletes in their development (Hong & Fraser, 2021).

HPSNZ's second area of focus is the wellbeing of the athletes, coaches and staff involved in HP sport. The pressure to succeed in elite sport can effect an athletes development not only in sport, but outside of sport as well (HPSNZ, 2021). HPSNZ provides support by way of initiatives and programmes to promote a culture where athletes and coaches are comfortable to seek help and support for their wellbeing (HPSNZ, 2021). Support for athletes also extends outside their sporting endeavours, and the importance of supporting the 'whole person' rather than just the 'sports person' increasingly is being seen. An example of this is seen in the way in which HPSNZ has been proactive in addressing the issues of gender equity and diversity in the HP sector.

The third area of focus for HPSNZ are the pathways which are designed for athlete development. HPSNZ pathways, for HP sport, are formed in order to identify and develop athletes and coaches who have the potential to succeed at an elite level in sport (HPSNZ, 2021). Termed as the 'end to end pathway', HPSNZ clearly defines the different stages of an athletes development to give a structure that moves towards repeatable success for future athletes (HPSNZ, 2021).

Because of the dynamic nature of sport, it is necessary that the HP pathways be able to change and adapt. Part of this change which has been identified by HPSNZ is the need to have increased representation and collaboration with the various stakeholders in New Zealand sport (HPSNZ, 2021). Primarily this is aimed at coaches and athletes, however the perceptions of community sport clubs can contribute significant insight into the issues associated at their level and benefit the facilitation of the pathways as a whole. The importance of HP sport within New Zealand, is a significant motivator as HPSNZ investigates and adapts their support of HP sport. The prioritisation of funding, wellbeing, and HP pathways are important steps towards optimising the nationwide delivery of sport (HPSNZ, 2021).

## **2.7 High Performance Sport Perceptions**

HP sport pathways involve athletes, coaches, clubs and sport organisations operating at local, regional and national level. The way that HP sport pathways are perceived is likely to differ across these levels, so it is important to consider this. By forming a greater understanding of all stakeholders perceptions and experiences, knowledge gained can be used to improve the current HP sport pathways. Often the areas that need improvement are specific to certain stakeholders and therefore can only be identified and advised by those it affects.

Research focused on athlete development programmes in Norwegian schools investigated the perceptions of coaches on the programmes implemented in their schools (Sotiriadou et al., 2017). Within this research it was highlighted that the athlete development system faced problems which were caused by a disconnect between the national organisations creating the programmes and the athletes. This disconnect was primarily due to the design and implementation of the programmes which offered limited flexibility for the coaches to provide in a targeted way for their athletes (Bjørndal & Gjesdal, 2020). In related research, it has been reported that often community sport clubs are unaware of HP policies and targets due to lack of communication between national, regional and club levels (Sotiriadou et al., 2017). This disconnect can lead to clubs being overlooked in the development and implementation of HP strategies (Lowther et al., 2016). The result of this is seen in clubs lacking the proper facilities, programmes, training or financial capabilities to

provide the needed structure to aid in providing athletes with effective pathways (Millar et al., 2020).

In order to better understand the implications and challenges associated with HP sport, research was conducted to determine the coaches perceptions of the HP sport model that they were involved in (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). Participants of this research claimed that the environment which they operated was based heavily around the belief that to be successful, you need to be winning. According to many coaches who participated, the implementation of HP sport models introduced into their organisation, did not align with the way in which they operated with athlete development (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). The additional funds which they received were beneficial, however the added pressure to succeed that came with those funds was viewed as a problem.

Research based on perceptions of elite players and coaches in women's cricket focused on their experiences in HP sport pathways (Lascu et al., 2021). This study highlighted the gap that had developed between the pathway stages, in Australian women's cricket. This gap appeared to be related to an increase in professionalism within women's cricket at the elite levels, without the same development and support at the amateur level (Lascu et al., 2021). Both athletes and coaches commented on the necessity for improvement in the amateur level by providing greater access for participants and the requirement to create a better foundation to start young female athletes on a HP pathway (Lascu et al., 2021).

As community sport clubs are the first step in an athlete's pathway to elite sport, there is a need to better understand their perspective on their role in the HP pathway system. This research focuses on community sport club perceptions of the prioritisation, facilitation, and accessibility of these pathways; an area as yet not investigated in related literature. This research will add value to the sports industry in the development and implementation of HP pathways across all levels of sport, in particular understanding the role and importance of community sport clubs.

Organisational landscapes within sport can often have a complex and fragmented nature. This then makes maintaining a detailed understanding of the multiple groups NSOs or RSOs are overseeing a challenging enterprise. It is expected that the greater the hierarchal gap in organisational landscapes, there is a greater chance that decisions regarding systems, such as HP pathways, may not

be as effective as they could be for the community sport clubs (Bjørndal & Ronglan, 2018).

Community clubs have a very important role and should be seen as a valuable commodity when one is investigating perceptions of all aspects of the sport sector. The people responsible for maintaining and developing the community clubs are well placed to have accurate knowledge of the potential, capabilities and needs of their club.

There are several things that can hinder the ability of community sport clubs to deliver sporting opportunities effectively. The practice of keeping to a restrictive or prescribed method of developing models and systems may work for some clubs, but for others it can be damaging. To continue forward in a state of ambivalence without gaining a better understanding of the needs and perceptions of community sport clubs could inhibit the ability of developing a more effective and efficient HP sport development system (Bjørndal & Ronglan, 2021; Lascu et al., 2021; Patatas et al., 2022). The creation of an effective HP sport system that has been informed by the first-hand knowledge of community sports clubs, will aid in achieving greater success with prioritisation in this area. It will allow funding and resources to be efficiently provided to areas which community sport clubs deem necessary, to provide the best service to their members and so in turn increase the progress towards elite pathways.

While we know a great deal about both HP sport, HP pathways, and community sport clubs, most of what we know about how they interact has come from the perspective of governing sport authorities. What has had little attention is the perspectives of those in community sport clubs regarding the HP pathways that they provide the foundation for. Their voice will give valuable insight that can inform decision making related to HP sport pathways. Therefore, it is important that research exploring the perceptions of community sport clubs is undertaken.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

This chapter details the methods used to gather and analyse the data of this research. It will cover methodology, questionnaire items, sampling and participants, measures, data collection, and data analysis. The research followed a mixed methods approach to effectively achieve the research aim; investigating sport club perceptions of prioritisation, facilitation, and accessibility of high performance (HP) pathways. The mixed method approach suited this research as the qualitative data deepened the understanding of the context forming quantitative data. This approach helped to establish an understanding of the representatives of community sport clubs' perceptions regarding HP sport pathways by providing a more thorough examination of the research topic.

### **3.1 Methodology**

In this research, representatives of New Zealand's community sports clubs, were asked to communicate their perceptions of HP within their sport. This project contributes to a comprehensive view of community sports clubs' involvement in HP pathways. A combination of post positivist and interpretivist approaches were used to provide a greater insight on this topic.

In post-positivism, social reality can be explained, predicted, or controlled based on knowledge discovered (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Positivist research requires that the researcher take an objective view on the subject under investigation to avoid bias in data collection. The researcher, as the 'expert', is an observer and collector of the thoughts and behaviours of the subject (Rudd & Johnson, 2013). In this approach, data is collected in numerical form, to then be statistically analysed (Grant & Giddings, 2002). For this study the post positivist view was taken using quantitative based methods. The predominate use of scaled questions supports the collection of static and measurable data, while controlling for any bias, values or other variables that might affect the research quality (Gibson, 2016). The objective viewpoint taken by the researcher and the use of a survey to gather the data that informs this study, supported the use of a post-positivist view. The epistemology associated with post positivist view is that there can be discovery and addition to an existing body of knowledge

Elements of a traditional interpretivist approach were also adopted for the collection and analysis of the open-ended questions. For this component of the research, an ontological stance characterised as nominalism which theorises that reality is subjective, dynamic and contextual is appropriate. To facilitate the discovery of truth from the viewpoint of the participants, they were asked open ended questions which allowed them to convey their thoughts and feelings (Libarkin & Kurdziel, 2002). The epistemology of the interpretivist stance is that the researcher is the collector and interpreter, while the participant is the source and giver of the knowledge. This requires the researcher to be reflexive when interpreting the data.

A mixed methods approach was chosen to provide a broader scope for this novel area of research, which supported the research aim of establishing an understanding of the perceptions of representatives of community sport clubs' regarding HP sport pathways (Zohrabi, 2013). By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the strengths of both methods are available and any weaknesses in the study design are mitigated (Rudd & Johnson, 2013). Mixed method research designs can provide a greater understanding of the research question leading to more assured insights about the topic being researched (van der Roest, Spaaij, & van Bottenburg, 2015; Rudd & Johnson, 2013).

The majority of the data collected for this study used a quantitative approach. Quantitative research is the strategy of collecting and analysing quantifiable numerical data to gain knowledge and a better understanding of situations when a trying to quantify the research question (Plante et al., 1994). Scaled questions were used for the quantitative data collection, which was then supported with qualitative research using open ended questions to broaden the understanding of the quantitative measurements (Gratton & Jones, 2014). Qualitative research is focused on using non numerical data, to gain an insights, experiences or opinions on the research topic.

For the qualitative phase, follow-up open-ended questions were used to allow respondents to expand on or complement their numeric responses by using their own words to express their sentiments. Open ended questions are an appropriate qualitative data collection method as it allows the participants to provide a comprehensive account of their views and experiences related to the topic (van der

Roest, et.al, 2015). The scaled questions and the open ended questions were analysed separately, and then results from the two sections were compared to see if any themes came through in both sets of data.

The combination of post positivist and interpretivist approaches provides a more complete investigation of this phenomenon. Much research in sport management is based on causal studies, with the focus being on cause and effect (Gibson, 2016). Mixed method approaches are better suited to study the causal description and causal explanation. This is because quantitative research is more adept at studying causal description, and qualitative research is better at looking into causal explanation. (Rudd & Johnson, 2013). Quantitative research follows the process of presenting an independent variable and a dependent variable to be investigated (Rudd & Johnson, 2013). The changes that occur in the independent variable, resulting in changes in the dependent variable, is then analysed to see the relationship between cause and effect. Qualitative research pays more attention to the why something happens and what that means, therefore providing causal explanation.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Data for this study was collected via the National Sport Club Survey (NSCS), which ran from the 19<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021. The NSCS is an annual online survey that seeks to generate a better understanding of the management and operation of NZ's community sport clubs. The 2021 NSCS was distributed via email to every NZ community sport clubs, Equating to over 7,000 NZ sport clubs who were invited to participate. A total of 1014 responses were received for the quantitative section, while 426 responses were received for the qualitative section. Survey participants were asked to respond to all items on behalf of their club. These representatives included board chairs, club presidents, paid administrators, secretaries, committee members and other club volunteers.

Participants confidentiality was maintained as no personal details were recorded. An information sheet was included explaining the purpose of the research and outlining the expected benefits. By clicking through to complete the survey the participants indicated their consent to participate. Responding clubs could opt into a

prize draw at the end of the survey which included a \$500 sport apparel voucher and five \$100 gift cards.

### 3.3 Measures

The 2021 NSCS was made up of several sections of items including membership, high performance pathways, management and governance.

The general club information retrieved that was used in this research is highlighted in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*General Club Items*

General Club Items	Response
Select which sport your club is associated with?	Choice of maximum 3 sports from list of XXXX
In which region does your club operate?	19 regions to choose from
As of today, what is the total number of members (of all types) in your club?	Asked to enter number
What is the total, annual operating budget of your club?	<\$5k \$5-10k \$10-25k \$25-50k \$50-100k >\$100k)
Which best describes the community in which your club operates?	Urban Rural Both
What percentage (%) of coaches in your club hold a coaching qualification?	Asked to enter number

As this area of research is not well developed, questions for this study were created specifically to cover high-level, overarching perspectives. The questions were designed to capture perceptions regarding the priority, accessibility, allocation

of resources, and helpfulness of Regional Sport Organisations (RSO) and National Sport Organisations (NSO) towards facilitation of HP sport pathways. This ultimately took the form of seven questions that were developed explicitly for this research. There were five scaled questions that were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree, Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Scaled Questions*

	High Performance Items
1	Facilitating high performance pathways for our club's members is a priority
2	Our club allocates resources for our members' high performance pathways
3	A high performance pathway for our club's members is accessible
4	Our <u>RSO</u> is helpful in facilitating a high performance pathway for our members
5	Our <u>NSO</u> is helpful in facilitating a high performance pathway for our members

Respondents were then asked two open-ended questions in order to provide a more detailed response in regards to facilitation of pathways and the NSO's and RSO's support of them (Table 3). Other NSCS survey items, querying the club's region, focal sport(s), financial performance and membership characteristics were also used for this project.

**Table 3**

*Open – Ended Questions*

	Open-Ended Questions
1	Is there anything else noteworthy about the way your club facilitates athlete advancement within high performance pathways?
2	Is there anything else noteworthy about how your RSO, NSO, Sport NZ or HPSNZ engage your members within a high performance pathway?

### **3.4 Data analysis**

#### ***Scaled Item Analysis***

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics and conduct means difference testing (Pallant, 2020). By providing the descriptive statistics the data was presented in a way which allowed easier visualisation of the characteristics of respondents and the spread of results. Once a clearer view of the groups had been obtained through descriptive statistics, differences between groups were explored using ANOVA tests.

A one-way ANOVA was used to identify any group differences. This is a statistical method which analyses differences between the means of three or more groups (Johnson & Wichern, 2020). Before the one way ANOVA test could be performed, assumptions were checked. These assumptions were that there should be a continuous dependent variable, that the independent must have two or more categorical groups, and there must be an independence of observations (Sawilowsky & Blair, 1992). Evidence supporting the assumption of independence emerged, as each group were made up of different participants, and no participant was in more than one group. To satisfy the assumption of independence, participants could only submit one survey. The sample was then verified checking that no responses appeared more than once.

Metrics related to the dependent variables also provided support for several ANOVA assumptions: significant outliers, normal distribution of data and homogeneity of variances. The data was checked for significant outliers, by visually inspecting a boxplot. When outliers were discovered, the decision was made to leave them in the sample, as it has been found that research that has a large sample size, such as this study, can retain outliers in the analysis without it materially affecting the results (Johnson & Wichern, 2020; Sawilowsky & Blair, 1992).

The next assumption to be tested was if the data was normally distributed. Testing normality was done by running the Shapiro Wilko test to see if the data is normally distributed in population. Regardless, parametric techniques assume that data being analysed is normally distributed, however in social research, dependent variable scores are seldom normally distributed therefore continuing with the tests is acceptable without cleaning the data (Pallant, 2020). A sample size of greater than

30 participants is considered robust, as it provides a fuller representation of the population (Johnson & Wichern, 2020). Therefore as the data was not normally distributed no transformations occurred and in the case were deemed viable data to be analysed via ANOVA tests. The Shapiro Wilko statistic was significant for all items when normality was tested, indicating that the data was not normally distributed.

Levene's test was used to test for homogeneity of variances. The purpose of the test for homogeneity of variances is to make sure the variances are equal across all groups (Pallany, 2020). In the case where any of the groups, in the one way ANOVA tests had unequal variances, Welch's ANOVA was used as it is unaffected by unequal variances. When the Welch ANOVA test was carried out, a Games–Howell test was conducted instead of a Tukey post hoc test, due to it not requiring equal standard deviations (Pallany, 2020). Both post hoc tests were then used to confirm where the group differences occurred in the statistically significant mean scores, to understand why the results were significant.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

The open-text data was analysed using thematic analysis. This is a common analysis method for qualitative studies, which investigates and reports patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The patterns that were discovered were then categorised and grouped based on common sentiments. The first stage of analysing the qualitative data was familiarisation with the data where all the responses were read, and key points and statements were highlighted. Key themes were then identified and coded using colour schemes to group them. From these themes quotes and sub themes were further noted as they emerged to provide the base of the discussion.

First, the research sought to establish familiarization with the data and this was initially done separately for each of the two questions. In a second read through key points and comments were highlighted based on the level of insight into the sentiment of representatives of community sport clubs' regarding HP pathways. For each question, highlighted comments were then separated into groups based on the sentiments that were prevalent amongst the responses. The groups of comments

from both questions were then brought together as four key sentiments which are described in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the analysis of the results from the questionnaire. First, descriptive statistics were examined in order to provide an overview of the independent variables. The second section consists of one-way ANOVA analyses, which were used to explore group differences across a variety of the independent variables. Last, the key sentiments derived from the open-ended questions relating to club perceptions of high performance (HP) pathways are presented.

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

In the 2021 National Sport Club Survey, 1011 New Zealand based community sport clubs participated. Representatives of these clubs were asked to indicate the sport that their club is associated with (Table 4). Outdoor bowls (n=91) and indoor bowls (n=67) were best represented. Not all clubs listed the sport they were affiliated with.

**Table 4**

#### *Affiliated Sport of Participating Clubs*

Sport	<i>n</i>	Sport	<i>n</i>	Sport	<i>n</i>	Sport	<i>n</i>
AFL	2	Aikido	1	American Football	2	Archery	9
Athletics	16	Badminton	11	Basketball	8	Billiard Sports	2
Boxing	7	Bridge	17	Cheerleading	2	Climbing	1
Cricket	27	Croquet	46	Cycling	24	Darts	6
Dragon Boating	2	Baseball	1	Equestrian	33	Fencing	4
Floorball	5	Flying	4	Football	33	Gliding	5
Golf	65	Gym Sports	17	Hockey	27	Ice Figure Skating	1
Indoor Bowls	67	Bowls*	17	Inline Hockey	2	Judo	3
Jui-Jitsu	3	Karate	13	Kart Sport	1	Marching	3
Motorcycling	7	Motorsport	11	Netball	34	Offroad	1
Orienteering	3	Outdoor Bowls	91	Petanque	7	Polo	1
Pony Club	1	Rodeo	1	Rowing	18	Rugby League	5
Rugby Union	20	Shooting (Clay target)	12	Shooting (Multiple)	9	Shooting (Pistol)	3
Shooting (Rifle)	1	Shooting (Target)	2	Skate	7	SLS	8
Snow Sports	5	Softball	10	Special Olympics	4	Speedway	2
Sport Fishing	3	Squash	18	Surfing	2	Swimming	25
Synchro	3	Table Tennis	6	Taekwondo	2	Tennis	54
Tenpin	1	Triathlon	3	Ultimate Frisbee	2	Underwater Hockey	1
Volleyball	9	Waka Ama	7	Water Polo	2	Water Skiing	1
Weightlifting	2	Yachting	13			Missing	107
						Total	1011

Respondents were also asked to indicate the New Zealand region in which their club operates (Table 5). Canterbury had the highest number of responding clubs (n=171), and Gisborne had the lowest number of responding clubs (n=6).

**Table 5**

*Region*

Region	<i>n</i>	Percent
Northland	35	3.5
AKL North	51	5.0
AKL West	23	2.3
AKL Central/East	57	5.6
AKL South	44	4.4
Waikato	83	8.2
BOP	52	5.1
Gisborne	6	0.6
Hawkes Bay	41	4.1
Nelson	19	1.9
Taranaki	39	3.9
Manawatu/Wanganui	48	4.7
Wellington	89	8.8
Tasman	9	0.9
Marlborough	23	2.3
West Coast	9	0.9
Canterbury	171	16.9
Otago	82	8.1
Southland	33	3.3
Missing	97	9.6
Total	1011	100.0

In order to assess the distribution of clubs between rural and urban communities, club representatives were asked to indicate the type of area in which

they operated in (Table 6). The majority of clubs (i.e., 58.7%) identified as urban (n = 593).

**Table 6**

*Community Type*

Community Type	<i>n</i>	Percent
Urban	593	58.7
Rural	252	24.9
Both	64	6.3
Missing	102	10.1
Total	1011	100

Respondents were asked to indicate the proportion of qualified coaches at their club (Table 7). The largest proportion of responding clubs (i.e., 25.9%) indicated that none of their coaches are qualified (n=262).

**Table 7**

*Proportion of Qualified Coaches*

Qualified Coaches	<i>n</i>	Percent
0%	262	25.9
1%	95	9.4
2 - 5%	137	13.6
6 - 25%	75	7.4
26 - 50%	71	7.0
51 - 99%	63	6.2
100%	134	13.3
Total	837	82.8
Missing	174	17.2
Total	1011	100.0

Clubs were asked to indicate the total number of members at their club (Table 8). The highest proportion of clubs had between 51-100 members (i.e., 18.7%), followed closely by clubs with more than 201 members (i.e., 18.2%). The lowest proportion of clubs had under 25 members (i.e., 12.3%).

**Table 8**

*Total Members*

Total Members	<i>n</i>	Percent
0-25	124	12.3
26-50	175	17.3
51-100	189	18.7
101-200	160	15.8
201+	184	18.2
Missing	179	17.7
Total	1011	100.0

The annual operating budget of responding clubs is shown in Table 9. The largest proportion of clubs (i.e., 29%) operate with an annual budget between \$5,000-\$25,000. The smallest proportion of clubs (i.e., 10.7%) reported an annual budget of more than \$100,000.

**Table 9***Annual Operating Budget*

Annual Operating Budget	<i>n</i>	Percent
<\$5,000	159	15.7
\$5,000-\$25,000	288	28.5
\$25,000-\$100,000	225	22.3
\$100,000 +	108	10.7
Missing	231	22.8
Total	1011	100.0

**4.2 Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways**

Prior to analysing group differences on each of the aforementioned independent variables, the overall mean scores on the HP perception items were calculated (Table 10). The highest mean score is for the item assessing HP pathway accessibility.

**Table 10***Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways*

Independent Variable	<i>n</i>	Mean	S.D.
High Performance Pathway Priority	591	4.63	1.81
Allocation of Resources to High Performance Pathway	596	4.41	1.95
Accessibility of High Performance Pathway	636	5.22	1.64
RSO High Performance Helpfulness	546	4.47	2.02
NSO High Performance Helpfulness	569	4.79	1.95

### 4.3 Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Sport

Sporting codes with less than 15 responding clubs were omitted from the subsequent analyses. In total there were 18 sporting codes represented by 15 or more clubs in the 2021 National Sport Club Survey: athletics ( $n = 16$ ), indoor bowls ( $n = 67$ ), outdoor bowls ( $n = 91$ ), bridge ( $n = 17$ ), cricket ( $n = 27$ ), croquet ( $n = 46$ ), cycling ( $n = 24$ ), equestrian ( $n = 33$ ), football ( $n = 33$ ), golf ( $n = 61$ ), gymnastics ( $n = 17$ ), hockey ( $n = 27$ ), netball ( $n = 34$ ), rowing ( $n = 18$ ), rugby union ( $n=20$ ), squash ( $n = 18$ ), swimming ( $n = 25$ ), and tennis ( $n = 54$ ). One-way ANOVA and one-way Welch ANOVA were used to explore differences across sports on the five scaled items (Table 11).

#### ***High Performance Pathway Priority***

Perceptions of the priority of HP pathways were significantly different among several sports, Welch's  $F(17, 102.54) = 1.83, p = .034$ . Results indicated that netball clubs ( $M = 3.95, SD = 1.90$ ) and tennis clubs ( $M = 4.06, SD = 1.92$ ) perceptions, showed the lowest priority given to high performance pathways (Table 11). Representatives of cycling clubs ( $M = 5.29, SD = 1.80$ ), rowing clubs ( $M = 5.15, SD = 1.57$ ) and swimming clubs ( $M = 5.56, SD = 0.92$ ), perceived, the most, that priority is given to high performance pathways. However, Tukey post hoc analysis revealed no homogeneous subsets were present, indicating that practical differences on mean scores are modest.

#### ***Allocation of Resources to High Performance Pathways***

Statistical analysis was then conducted to determine if community sport clubs allocated resources to HP pathways differently across sports. Hockey clubs ( $M = 3.69, SD = 2.10$ ) and outdoor bowls clubs ( $M = 3.94, SD = 1.95$ ) perceived to be the lowest priority given towards allocating resources to HP pathways. Swimming clubs ( $M = 5.24, SD = 1.48$ ) and rowing clubs ( $M = 5.50, SD = 1.62$ ) perceived to be the highest priority given towards allocating resources to HP pathways (Table 11). However, the differences between these sports were not statistically significant,  $F(17, 379) = 1.056, p = .397$ .

### **Accessibility of High Performance Pathway**

The perceived accessibility of HP pathways was next compared across the different sports. Hockey clubs ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ) and netball clubs ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ) perceived to be the lowest priority given towards providing an accessible HP pathway to their members. Swimming clubs ( $M = 5.88$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) and football clubs ( $M = 5.85$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ) perceived to be highest priority given towards providing an accessible HP pathway to their members (Table 11). However, the difference between these sports was not statistically significant,  $F(17, 416) = 1.402$ ,  $p = .131$ .

### **Regional Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness**

Perceptions of the helpfulness of a club's regional sport organisation (RSO) with facilitating HP pathways was statistically different between sports, Welch's  $F(17, 100.84) = 1.880$ ,  $p = .029$ . Community sport clubs that perceived RSO's are helpful with facilitating HP pathways the least, were gym sport clubs ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ) and cycling clubs ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ). Clubs that agreed the most with the sentiment that RSO's are helpful with facilitating HP pathways were cricket clubs ( $M = 5.41$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ), squash clubs ( $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ), tennis clubs ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) (Table 11).

Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the increase in mean scores from gym sports clubs to tennis clubs was significant (2.78, 95% CI (.01 to 5.46),  $p = .033$ ). The mean scores increasing from gym sports clubs to cricket clubs (3.16, 95% CI (.35 to 5.97),  $p = .011$ ) was also significant. However, no other group differences were statistically significant.

### **National Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness**

Community sport club's perceptions of the help provided by their national sport organisation (NSO) to HP pathways was statistically different across sports,  $F(17, 363) = 2.110$ ,  $p = .006$ . Gym sports clubs ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ), rugby union clubs ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ), and football clubs ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ), perception on the sentiment that NSO's help in facilitating HP pathways was the lowest. Clubs that agreed the most, on average, with the sentiment that NSO's are helpful with facilitating HP pathways were athletics clubs ( $M = 5.44$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ) and swimming clubs ( $M = 5.54$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) (Table 11). However, Tukey post hoc analysis did not

reveal any homogeneous subsets by sport on this variable. This could be due to the mean differences being minute and should be taken into account when interpreting the practical significance of these findings.

**Table 11**

*Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Sport*

Sport	HP Pathway Priority		Allocation of Resources to HP		Accessible HP pathway		Helpful RSO		Helpful NSO	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Athletics	4.22	2.05	4.25	2.14	5.46	1.27	4.90	1.66	5.44	1.74
Indoor Bowls	4.59	1.78	4.53	1.92	5.24	1.71	4.55	2.17	5.17	1.78
Outdoor Bowls	4.37	1.78	3.94	1.95	5.26	1.41	4.77	1.98	4.96	1.91
Bridge	4.30	1.70	4.20	1.55	5.00	1.58	4.56	2.13	4.75	2.12
Cricket	4.78	1.93	4.44	2.13	5.62	1.43	*5.41	1.47	4.61	1.94
Croquet	4.40	1.87	4.24	1.96	5.45	1.45	4.77	1.95	5.33	1.59
Cycling	5.29	1.80	4.76	2.05	4.84	1.83	3.67	2.16	4.67	2.09
Equestrian	5.09	1.38	4.46	1.77	5.36	1.44	4.11	1.91	5.21	1.79
Football	4.61	1.87	4.75	1.94	5.85	1.38	4.43	1.95	3.92	2.04
Golf	4.41	1.84	4.03	1.90	4.80	1.59	4.26	1.98	4.29	1.95
Gym Sports	4.45	2.30	4.09	2.17	4.83	1.64	*2.25	1.67	2.89	2.15
Hockey	4.60	1.92	3.69	2.10	4.63	1.71	4.76	2.25	4.18	2.01
Netball	3.95	1.90	4.11	2.06	4.73	1.78	4.70	2.16	4.41	2.01
Rowing	5.15	1.57	5.50	1.62	5.57	1.56	4.86	2.03	5.14	1.99
Rugby Union	4.21	1.97	4.08	1.98	5.20	1.62	4.38	1.56	3.73	1.68
Squash	4.30	2.31	4.46	1.98	5.00	2.13	5.14	1.29	5.25	1.42
Swimming	5.56	.92	5.24	1.48	5.88	1.41	4.60	2.03	5.54	1.27
Tennis	4.06	1.92	4.00	2.00	4.84	1.70	*5.03	1.69	5.18	1.78

\*Sport based mean scores significantly different than other sports based on post-hoc testing

#### **4.4 Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Region**

The next set of analyses were done based on the region within New Zealand that club representatives reported. Regions with 15 or more responding clubs were included. One-way ANOVA and one-way Welch ANOVA were the techniques used to explore relationships between variables. Each test involves a categorical independent variable, with two or more categorical independent groups, and a continuous dependent variable. In this analysis, the region in which the club operated was the independent variable. Mean scores based on region is provided in Table 9.

##### ***High Performance Pathway Priority***

A one-way Welch ANOVA was conducted to determine if community sport clubs prioritised HP pathways differently based on the region they operated in. There were no statistically significant differences between the groups  $F(15, 153.76) = .788, p = .689$  (Table 12).

##### ***Allocation of Resources to High Performance***

The allocation of resources towards HP pathways was compared across the different regions. There were no statistically significant differences between regions,  $F(15, 156.464) = .802, p = .674$  (Table 12).

##### ***Accessibility of High Performance Pathway***

A one-way ANOVA was performed to determine if community sport clubs perceive an accessible HP pathway for their members, and whether it was different based on the region in which they operate. It was found that the differences between the regions were not statistically significant,  $F(15, 603) = .881, p = .586$  (Table 12).

##### ***Regional Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness***

Analysis was conducted to determine if the perceptions of community sport clubs on the helpfulness of their RSO towards facilitating a HP pathway differed by region. However, the differences between the regions, in relation to the mean scores, were not statistically significant,  $F(15, 520) = 1.466, p = .113$  (Table 12).

### ***National Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness***

The final analysis by region explored whether perceptions of NSO helpfulness regarding HP differed by region (Table 12). However, the differences between the regions were not statistically significant,  $F(15, 542) = .751, p = .732$ .

**Table 12***Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Region*

Region	HP Pathway Priority		Allocation of Resources to HP		Accessible HP pathway		Helpful RSO		Helpful NSO	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Northland	4.61	1.92	4.72	1.97	5.29	1.68	4.13	2.32	4.85	2.16
AKL North	4.74	1.59	4.84	1.84	5.52	1.66	4.78	1.85	4.59	1.93
AKL West	5.06	1.52	4.56	1.85	4.63	1.78	4.69	1.80	4.55	1.92
AKL Central/East	4.60	1.90	4.33	1.99	5.02	1.91	4.02	1.92	4.50	2.01
AKL South	4.80	1.71	4.42	1.75	4.91	1.87	3.62	1.98	4.84	1.68
Waikato	4.69	1.78	4.12	1.98	5.17	1.75	4.08	1.94	4.51	1.98
BOP	4.84	1.61	4.85	1.79	5.43	1.39	4.29	1.99	5.16	1.91
Hawke's Bay	5.07	1.52	4.87	1.82	5.81	0.900	3.93	2.16	4.29	2.27
Nelson	5.08	1.26	4.79	1.63	5.47	1.13	4.93	2.12	5.47	1.41
Taranaki	4.70	2.06	4.22	2.02	5.04	1.88	4.86	2.10	4.62	1.94
Manawatu/Wanganui	5.05	1.68	4.56	1.93	5.03	1.59	4.21	2.08	4.62	1.94
Wellington	4.35	1.97	4.07	2.21	4.96	1.77	4.62	2.08	4.96	1.90
Marlborough	4.13	1.92	4.44	2.03	5.19	1.87	4.50	2.22	4.62	2.22
Canterbury	4.55	1.90	4.30	1.99	5.31	1.55	4.95	1.92	4.93	1.92
Otago	4.24	1.96	4.07	2.10	5.16	1.72	4.86	1.93	5.00	1.96
Southland	4.50	1.67	4.81	1.76	5.55	1.26	4.31	1.92	4.73	2.05

**4.5 Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Qualified Coaches**

Next, community sport club perceptions on the facilitation of HP pathways were compared based on the percentage of qualified coaches at clubs. Table 13 displays the mean scores for the percentage of qualified coaches based on each of the outcome variables. One-way ANOVA and one-way Welch ANOVA were the analysis techniques used to explore relationships between variables.

### **High Performance Pathway Priority**

The priority of facilitating HP pathways differed for clubs based on the extent that coaches are qualified (Table 13). Scores for facilitation of HP pathways as a priority was statistically significant between the different levels of qualified coaches, Welch's  $F(6, 198.424) = 5.641, p < .001$ .

Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from 0% to 2-5% (1.12, 95% CI [0.45, 1.78]) was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). Increases in mean scores also occurred from 0% to 26-50% (.97, 95% CI [.10, 1.85],  $p = .018$ ), 0% to 51 - 99% (1.11, 95% CI [.27, 1.95],  $p = .002$ ), and 0% to 100% (.85, 95% CI [.17, 1.54],  $p = .005$ ).

### **Allocation of Resources to High Performance Pathways**

The extent to which clubs reported allocating resources to HP pathways varied for clubs based on the proportion of qualified coaches (Table 13). Scores for allocation of resources towards HP pathways was statistically significant between the different levels of qualified coaches, Welch's  $F(6, 196.197) = 6.017, p < .001$ .

Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from 0% to 2-5% (1.18, 95% CI [0.47, 1.88]) was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), as well as the increase from 0% to 26-50% (.90, 95% CI [.01, 1.78],  $p = .044$ ), the increase from 0% to 51 - 99% (1.25, 95% CI [.37, 2.14],  $p < .001$ ), and the increase from 0% to 100% (.84, 95% CI [.10, 1.57],  $p = .014$ ).

### **Accessibility of High-Performance Pathway**

A clubs' perception of an accessible HP pathway differed for clubs with varying levels of qualified coaches (Table 13). Scores for the perceived accessibility of HP pathways were statistically significant between the different levels of qualified coaches, Welch's  $F(6, 214.420) = 5.020, p < .001$ .

Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from 0% to 1% (0.74, 95% CI [0.06, 1.41]) was statistically significant ( $p = .024$ ), as well as the increase from 0% to 2-5% (.96, 95% CI [.39, 1.53],  $p < .001$ ), the increase from 0% to 6 - 25% (.90, 95% CI [.18, 1.61],  $p = .005$ ), the increase from 0% to 51-99% (.97,

95% CI [.25, 1.68],  $p = .001$ ), and the increase from 0% to 100% (.59, 95% CI [.01, 1.18],  $p = .044$ ).

### **Regional Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness**

The next analysis was conducted to determine if perceptions of RSO helpfulness on HP varied between clubs with different levels of qualified coaches. (Table 13). However, the differences between these groups were not statistically significant, Welch's  $F(6, 174.005) = 1.701$ ,  $p = .123$ .

### **National Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness**

A clubs' perception relating to the helpfulness of their NSO in facilitating a HP pathway was statistically significant for clubs with different levels of qualified coaches (Table 13). Scores for the perceived helpfulness of NSO's towards facilitating HP pathways were statistically significant between the different levels of qualified coaches, Welch's  $F(6, 182.555) = 2.367$ ,  $p = .032$ .

Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from 0% to 2-5% (0.84, 95% CI [0.11, 1.57]) was statistically significant ( $p = .12$ ), but no other group differences were statistically significant.

**Table 13**

#### *Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Qualified Coaches*

Qualified Coaches	HP Pathway Priority		Allocation of Resources to HP		Accessible HP pathway		Helpful RSO		Helpful NSO	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
0%	*4.03	1.84	*3.77	1.93	*4.69	1.86	4.06	2.09	*4.35	2.10
1%	4.50	1.66	4.30	1.91	*5.42	1.21	4.53	1.94	4.82	1.87
2-5%	*5.15	1.57	*4.94	1.88	*5.65	1.28	4.86	2.03	*5.19	1.81
6-25%	4.58	1.85	4.66	1.91	*5.58	1.47	4.55	2.09	5.00	1.92
26-50%	*5.00	1.61	*4.78	1.79	5.35	1.39	4.67	1.79	4.76	1.86
51-99%	*5.14	1.72	*5.02	1.70	*5.65	1.51	4.63	1.88	4.78	2.02
100%	*4.88	1.83	*4.60	1.96	*5.28	1.63	4.60	1.92	5.09	1.68

\*Qualified coaches group based mean scores significantly different than other qualified coaches groups based on post-hoc testing

#### **4.6 Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Community Type**

Participants were classified into three groups: urban ( $n = 397$ ), rural ( $n = 250$ ), and both ( $n = 40$ ).

Mean scores for the percentage of qualified coaches at community club's variable is displayed in Table 14. One-way ANOVA and one-way Welch ANOVA were the analysis techniques used to explore relationships between variables. Each test involved a categorical independent variable, with two or more categorical independent groups, and a continuous dependent variable.

##### ***High Performance Pathways Priority***

Clubs' prioritisation for facilitating a HP pathway to their members, was compared across clubs of different community types (Table 14). However, the differences between these community type groups were not statistically significant,  $F(2, 584) = .394, p = .675$ .

##### ***Allocation of Resources to High Performance Pathways***

Clubs' allocation of resources for HP pathways, was explored across clubs of different community types (Table 14). However, the differences between these community type groups were not statistically significant,  $F(2, 588) = 1.33, p = .265$ .

##### ***Accessibility of High-Performance Pathway***

The accessibility of a clubs' HP pathway, to its members, was examined in relation to clubs grouped by community type (Table 14). However, the differences between these community type groups were not statistically significant,  $F(2, 629) = .483, p = .617$ .

##### ***Regional Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness***

The perceptions of a club on the helpfulness of their RSO, with facilitating a HP pathway, was compared across clubs of different community types (Table 14). However, the differences between these community type groups were not statistically significant,  $F(2, 539) = 1.02, p = .363$ .

### ***National Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness***

Finally, clubs' perceptions on the helpfulness of their NSO, with facilitating a HP pathway, was examined across clubs grouped by community type (Table 14). However, the differences between these community type groups were not statistically significant,  $F(2, 562) = 1.10, p = .333$ .

**Table 14**

*Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Community Type*

Community Type	HP Pathway Priority		Allocation of Resources to HP		Accessible HP Pathway		Helpful RSO		Helpful NSO	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Urban	4.58	1.80	4.44	1.94	5.25	1.63	4.54	2.00	4.83	1.94
Rural	4.69	1.82	4.22	1.91	5.11	1.63	4.35	2.07	4.79	1.94
Both	4.80	1.86	4.72	2.06	5.18	1.78	4.15	2.04	4.38	2.07

### **4.7 Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Annual Operating Budget**

Clubs' perceptions of HP pathways were statistically analysed with regards to a club's annual operating budgets. Displayed in Table 15 are the mean scores for the varied levels of annual operating budget at community sport clubs. One-way ANOVA and one-way Welch ANOVA were the analysis techniques used to explore relationships between variables. Each test involved a categorical independent variable, with two or more groups, and a continuous dependent variable.

#### ***High Performance Pathway Priority***

When exploring the relationship between the priority of facilitating HP pathways for clubs of different levels of annual operating budgets, it was revealed that there were statistically significant differences (Table 15). Scores for facilitation of

HP pathways as a priority was statistically significant between the different levels of annual operating budgets, Welch's  $F(3, 253.835) = 3.445, p = .017$ .

Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from \$5,000 to \$100,000 or more (0.76, 95% CI [0.09, 1.43]) was statistically significant ( $p = .018$ ), but no other group differences showed significance.

### ***Allocation of Resources to High Performance Pathways***

The allocation of resources to HP pathways was compared across clubs, grouped by different levels of annual operating budgets (Table 15). Scores for allocation of resources for HP pathways was statistically significant between the different levels of annual operating budgets, Welch's  $F(3, 259.066) = 4.811, p = .003$ .

Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from <5k to 25 - 100k (.822, 95% CI [.20, 1.44],  $p = .004$ ) and <5 to 100k+ (.966, 95% CI [.25, 1.68],  $p = .003$ ) were statistically significant. However no other group differences were statistically significant.

### ***Accessibility of High-Performance Pathway***

Analysis focusing on the accessibility of a club's HP pathway to its members was compared across clubs with different levels of annual operating budgets (Table 15). However, the differences between the different levels of annual operating budgets were not statistically significant,  $F(3, 611) = 1.935, p = .123$ .

### ***Regional Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness***

Analysis was performed on the annual operating budget variable on whether the clubs perceived if their RSO was helpful with the facilitation of a HP pathway. (Table 15). The differences between mean groups based on a club's perception on the helpfulness of their RSO, with the facilitation of HP pathways, were not statistically significant  $F(3, 524) = .334, p = .801$ .

### ***National Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness***

The final analysis performed on the annual operating budget variable was on whether the clubs perceived if their NSO was helpful with the facilitation of a HP pathway (Table 15). However, the differences between the varying levels of annual operating budgets were not statistically significant,  $F(3, 546) = .973, p = .405$ .

**Table 15***Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Annual Operating Budget*

Annual Operating Budget	HP Pathway Priority		Allocation of Resources to HP		Accessible HP Pathway		Helpful RSO		Helpful NSO	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
<5k	*4.25	1.88	*3.78	2.09	5.05	1.75	4.44	2.13	4.73	1.96
5-25k	4.53	1.82	4.34	1.94	5.12	1.66	4.39	2.06	4.73	2.03
25-100k	4.78	1.74	*4.61	1.88	5.45	1.41	4.60	1.97	4.98	1.82
100k+	*5.01	1.71	*4.75	1.80	5.27	1.72	4.44	1.89	4.58	1.96

*\*Annual operating budget groups based mean scores significantly different than other annual operating budget groups based on post-hoc testing*

**4.8 Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Total Membership**

Statistical analysis was conducted on club perceptions, on HP pathways, with regards to clubs' total number of members. Participants were classified into four groups: 0-25 members ( $n = 124$ ), 26-50 members ( $n = 175$ ), 51-100 members ( $n = 189$ ), 101-200 members ( $n = 160$ ) and 201 or more club members ( $n = 184$ ).

One-way ANOVA and one-way Welch ANOVA were the analysis techniques used to explore relationships between variables. Each test involved a categorical independent variable, with two or more categorical independent groups, and a continuous dependent variable. Mean scores based on total membership is provided in Table 16.

***High Performance Pathway Priority***

Analysis was conducted to determine if a club's priority for facilitating a HP pathway for their members was varied for clubs of different total club member groups (Table 16). However, the differences between these member total groups were not statistically significant,  $F(4, 581) = 1.468, p = .210$ .

### ***Allocation of Resources to High Performance Pathways***

The allocation of resources to HP pathways was compared across the clubs based on the different total club member groups (Table 16). However, the differences between these member total groups were not statistically significant,  $F(4, 587) = 1.767, p = .134$ .

### ***Accessibility of High-Performance Pathway***

The accessibility of HP pathways, to members, was compared across the clubs based on the different total club member groups (Table 16). However, the differences were not statistically significant,  $F(4, 627) = 1.171, p = .323$ .

### ***Regional Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness***

A one-way Welch ANOVA was conducted to determine if clubs' perceptions on the helpfulness of their RSO, in facilitating a HP pathway, varied for clubs of different total club member groups (Table 16). However, the differences between these total member groups were not statistically significant, Welch's  $F(4, 243.280) = 1.384, p = .240$ .

### ***National Sport Organisation High Performance Pathway Helpfulness***

Finally, analysis was conducted to determine if clubs' perceptions on the helpfulness of their NSO, in facilitating a HP pathway, varied for clubs of different total club member groups (Table 16). However, the differences between these total member groups were not statistically significant,  $F(4, 560) = 1.081, p = .365$ .

**Table 16***Club Perceptions of High Performance Pathways by Total Membership*

Total Membership	HP Pathway Priority		Allocation of Resources to HP		Accessible HP pathway		Helpful RSO		Helpful NSO	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
0-25	4.64	1.71	4.03	2.01	5.39	1.63	4.59	2.14	5.08	1.99
26-50	4.32	1.90	4.26	1.94	5.02	1.70	4.02	2.20	4.55	2.09
51-100	4.54	18.4	4.30	2.00	5.09	1.63	4.51	2.02	4.91	1.94
101-200	4.80	1.73	4.51	1.93	5.31	1.61	4.68	1.96	4.83	1.86
200+	4.80	1.82	4.68	1.90	5.32	1.64	4.53	1.86	4.67	1.91

## 4.9 Thematic Analysis

After the five scaled items in the questionnaire, participants responded to two open-ended questions. These questions were designed to learn more about club perceptions of HP pathways, by allowing the community sport clubs more freedom in their responses. First, participants were asked *“Is there anything else noteworthy about the way your club facilitates athlete advancement within pathways?”* A total of 374 community sport clubs gave a response. Secondly, participants were asked, *“Is there anything else noteworthy about how your RSO, NSO, Sport NZ or High Performance Sport NZ engage your members within a high-performance pathway?”* The total number of community sport clubs to provide a response for this question was 312.

Thematic analysis was conducted to explore the open-text data. Through this process, four prominent club sentiments relating to HP pathways were evident: supporting athlete development, prioritising participation, a lack of organisational capacity, and NSO and RSO HP engagement.

### ***Supporting Athlete Development***

A prominent sentiment that emerged was that clubs perceive their primary HP pathway contribution to be supporting athlete development. Ways in which community sport clubs support athlete development is through the work of dedicated coaches, encouragement to compete in regional and national events and acknowledging when the athlete needs to leave their club to further their development.

Responding clubs highlighted the importance and dedication of coaches to facilitating an effective space for their members. In doing so, athletes are given a greater opportunity to develop. Community sport clubs' facilitation of athlete development is influenced by the expertise and support of their coaches, and it was emphasized that they have an important impact at this stage of an athlete's journey.

*“We have an exceptional group of Coaches who spend time mentoring these players and more often than not though we are a non-professional entity, these coaches are funding travel, boots, food, accommodation from their own pockets” (Rugby Union/ Touch Club, Auckland North).*

Another aspect of athlete development that was deemed an important contribution from the club is the encouragement and support provided. Community sport clubs can be seen to encourage their athletes to participate in competitive events as a necessary step to develop their HP potential.

“We encourage and support participation in regional and national competition”  
(*Table Tennis Club, Nelson*)

At a stage in an athlete’s development, clubs must acknowledge when they are unable to provide development to a certain level. Therefore, some clubs final act of support for their athletes is to encourage them to move to clubs with the capacity to further their development. A football club from Hawke’s Bay specifically highlighted that they can only assist their athletes to a certain level.

“We accept and acknowledge we can only get the player to participate at a certain league level. They go with our support if they seek a higher league with another club” (*Football Club, Hawke’s Bay*).

### ***Prioritising Participation***

Perceptions of whether sport should be focused on participation or HP, emerged from some of the responses. A sentiment was expressed that community clubs find it challenging to provide an equal balance between HP and participation sport. From the responses, a section of community sport clubs, highlighting this theme, were in favour of a more participation focused approach. In some instances, this can be because the community sport club’s members are not interested in HP sport. One respondent, from a tennis club in Taranaki commented:

“Our club is a social club, and we don’t have any high performance tennis players in our midst” (*Tennis Club, Taranaki*).

Regardless of whether clubs prioritise participation over HP opportunities, some clubs seem willing to provide all the support they a capable of to help athletes who are looking to move into HP sport. A yachting club in Waikato noted:

“Ours like many other small regional clubs focus on participation, if someone comes through with the drive to advance, we have the resources to support them” (*Yachting Club, Waikato*).

A reason why a club will focus on participation rather than HP can be due to the resources available to the club. To focus on developing HP sport at their club would require diverting resources away from their primary responsibility. In the case of this club representative's comment, to provide for HP athletes, resources would be taken away from the younger participants of the club. This can result in the athlete's development opportunities into HP sport being neglected:

"tbh (to be honest) it diverts much needed resources as well as opportunities for competition towards this age group (which are older and often well resourced) away from the clubs main demographic. This puts pressure on committee to raise funds and run alternative competitions for younger children" (*Pony Club, Canterbury*).

### ***Lack of Organisational Capacity***

For some community sport clubs there is a desire to be able to provide for HP athletes, however the capacity to do this can be too great. In particular the financial capacity to provide HP sport to their members is a step too far for some community sport clubs. Sentiments regarding the lack of resources was an area that was highlighted amongst some of the responding clubs. A comment highlighted this difficulty, recognizing that the gap between HP and community sport clubs is an issue. It means some clubs are unable to provide HP assistance to their members due to the lack accessibility to the required resources.

"The NSO is very heavily influenced by the northern clubs. Accessing HP resources is difficult to navigate. The jump from club resources to HP is large and there should be better intermediary steps" (*Canoe, Surfing and Kayaking Club, Wellington*).

For some clubs, the lack of human capacity is the issue stopping them from providing HP pathways effectively. Having the volunteers capable to manage the running of HP sport at community clubs is limiting their potential to develop athletes. As mentioned in this comment this Waikato clubs' RSO has looked to fill the gaps, however disconnect has meant the club is still struggling:

"RSO tries their hardest to facilitate but club disconnect can occur. The business of life sees many clubs struggle for the necessary volunteers to

make things happen and the RSO in trying to fill the gap for all becomes spread too thin. Greater need exists for clubs to receive funding assistance, so they can appoint and service the growth and development in the youth age groups, that will then feed RSO's representative need and in turn NSO's national need" (*Darts and Golf Club, Waikato*).

Perceptions of clubs offering sports considered low priority, in the New Zealand HP sport environment, feel like they are under invested in regardless of the ability of athletes in their sport. When clubs of low priority sport look for resources or support to progress their athletes into the HP levels they find that they are ignored for higher priority sports. In the case of a gym sports club in Northland, they feel they are under-invested in, especially in terms of infrastructure. This results in a situation severely impacting the potential for the community sport club to grow and support their members:

"We are a community club and sport that is under-valued and under-invested in at all levels. This severely impacts our resources to activate high performance and create a high performing environment. Like most community gymnastics clubs around NZ we don't have a permanent home instead we utilise run-down old warehouses despite our growing membership numbers and popularity with girls. We have no sense of belonging. For a number of years we have pitched to organisations with a sphere of influence (RST, local government - District Council LTP, AP processes, Regional Council targeted sports rate) only to be disappointed time and time again, when we see MALE participation privileged with investment and infrastructure, funding provided for spaces and places that benefit masculine sports culture" (*Gym Sports Club, Northland*).

### ***National Sport Organisation and Regional Sport Organisation High Performance Engagement***

Respondents reported a variety of thoughts on the way NSOs and RSOs engaged with their clubs related to HP. Clubs highlighted various methods in which they received assistance from these sport organisations, including good communication and the creation of HP pathways. Additionally, communication of opportunities to members wanting to progress through the sports HP programmes is

a desired form of engagement for the community sport clubs. As mentioned by a West Coast hockey club, having contacts and conversations about pathways is critical to deliver HP for their members:

“Our RSO has forged very good contacts and pathways regionally and specifically with another Association and this is the key to opening up high performance pathways for our club members” (*Hockey Club, West Coast*).

Certain relationships described by some community sport club representatives are described a step further, as having a collaborative relationship with their NSO or RSO is highlighted by some community sport clubs. Developing HP pathways with their NSO is mentioned in a comment by a Canterbury equestrian club:

“We work with our national body ESNZ who work with High Performance Sport NZ to develop elite pathways for our members” (*Equestrian Sports Club, Canterbury*).

However equally prominent was the perception, of some clubs, that engagement with higher level sport organisations was poor. Amongst the respondents they felt the work that was being applied to providing HP pathways was inadequate and often failing the progression of athletes. The following comment from an Otago cycling club highlights this:

“Cycling NZ and MTBNZ have a lot of work to do. There is a huge divide between riders/ clubs and the national bodies supposed to be supporting them. National events are organised inconsistently and communication as to how and what criteria exists to get selected for world championships lacks transparency. Cycling NZ makes no effort to provide clear communication to potential athletes” (*Cycling Club, Otago*).

This perception of lack of engagement extends to the point that any contact or relationship with RSOs, NSOs, or Sport NZ was deemed nonexistent by some community sport clubs. Some club’s representatives commented that they would not even know how to engage with high-level sport organisations associated with high performance sport in New Zealand:

“We haven't heard from RSO, NSO or Sport NZ so I have no idea how they engage our players for performance pathways” (*Netball Club, Hawke's Bay*).

However, it was noted by other respondents that the higher-level sport organisations pathways and development plans do not allow for any contribution from the community clubs. As highlighted, in this comment, the situation of RSOs and NSOs organising HP pathways for community clubs can be found constricting:

“Our RSO is very prescriptive in this area and does not allow the club to set any pathway outside theirs” (*Tennis Club, Auckland North*).

Respondents have also commented on how NSOs and RSOs, in their structuring and provision of HP pathways, can be ineffective in relation to how the club operates. This could be due to a lack of communication and collaboration between the sport organisations and clubs, when planning how to design and implement HP programmes.

“Club coach and athlete together should be included in the HP pathway. The discussions should be had with both the clubs and coaches on how best to implement the HP pathway programme for young athletes to follow. Sport is not a one size fits all therefore, HP pathway should consider what is happening at the athletes' local clubs and local club trainings. Better working relationships between club coaches and HP coaches. Working together helps safeguard against HP undermining club programmes” (*Canoe and Surf Life Saving Club, Wellington*).

#### **4.10 Summary**

Community sport clubs report that although they can provide a quality service to their members, they have their limits. Where clubs do feel they contribute heavily towards HP pathways is by supporting athlete development. However, there is the sentiment that due to the organisational capacity of the community sport clubs, they can only develop the athletes to a certain level. Club resources are important to provide for their social and HP level members equally but are often lacking. Finally, there is a sentiment that NSO and RSO engagement is important to avoiding the challenge of limited resources. However, for many clubs this is done poorly or not at all.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The aim of this research project was to establish an understanding of community sport club perceptions of HP sport pathways. This chapter is a discussion and reflection on the data that was gathered. Overall, community sport club representatives perceive that HP sport pathways are being facilitated satisfactorily, but there are some areas that need to be improved. Specifically, it was found that HP perceptions differed by sport, annual operating budget and the percentage of qualified coaches. Open-ended responses from club representatives also revealed unique insights that are subsequently reflected on. At the conclusion of this chapter, practical implications, limitations and future research ideas are presented.

### **5.1 Annual Operating Budget**

One of the club characteristics serving as an independent variable in this analysis was a club's budget and differing perceptions emerged based on it. Community sport clubs with annual operating budgets of less than \$5,000 reported prioritising HP pathways less than clubs with higher annual operating budgets. This may be reflective of the financial capacity of the respective clubs. As the primary aim for most community sport clubs is to provide opportunities to participate in sport, if a community sport club has limited financial capacity, less HP sport opportunities can be offered to members due to the increased cost associated with them. The degree to which a club will prioritize HP pathways often correlates with their ability to be flexible in the allocation of resources. Clubs with a limited annual operating budget may have reduced ability to prioritize the cost of HP sport in addition to their everyday provision of recreational sport.

Findings suggest that a larger sport club budget aligns allows allocation of funds to both participation and HP. Stated another way, in order to facilitate both HP sport and participation opportunities to members, community sport clubs need a large enough annual operating budget. Additionally, this connects to the discussion around a club's organisational capacity as a large proportion of respondents reported challenges associated with financial capability and the differing financial requirements of HP sport and community level sport.

Community sport clubs predominately operate with limited budgets when developing club ventures (Ferkins & Bottenburg, 2013; Misener & Doherty, 2009).

Consequently, any additional ventures, away from their primary task, is likely to impact other areas of the club's operations (Doherty et al., 2014). The expenditure required for facilitation of HP sport can be steep, making the dual provision of participation sport and HP sport a challenge. Some community sport clubs with smaller budgets are therefore limited to offering primarily participation sport opportunities, and providing HP sport pathways only when they have the capacity to do so. It's not clear if those at NSOs and other HP-focused organisations are aware of the extent that finances limit a club's HP facilitation potential.

## **5.2 Variations in Organisational Support**

This research brought attention to the relationships that community sport clubs have with their RSOs and NSOs regarding HP pathways. The sentiments from club representatives are mixed regarding the role of these higher-level organisations within HP sport pathways.

For gym sports clubs, the mean scores for the scaled questions focusing on NSO and RSO involvement with HP sport pathways was notably low. This is an interesting finding as NZ gym sports governance structure does not include RSO's, which explains the low mean scores for this item (Howman et al., 2021). This finding illustrates the challenges faced by clubs who are unfamiliar with their own sport structure, suggesting that a lack of knowledge impacts their ability to work effectively within the systems provided to them. The gym sport NSO, Gymnastics NZ, were also perceived as not providing enough help with HP sport pathways. Gym sport club representatives reported that the HP pathways were provided to their members, but that more help from their NSO was required. This implies that there is a disconnect in communication between gym sport clubs and Gymnastics NZ (GNZ), in regard to what is expected from both entities in facilitating the HP sport pathway.

These findings suggesting a disconnect between gym sport clubs and GNZ, support findings of a recent independent report investigating the problems faced by Gymnastics NZ (Howman et al., 2021). The report highlights a lack of understanding regarding the HP sport pathways in gym sports and poor management of transparency, consistency and communication in the requirements for athletes to progress into HP sport. The result is a lack of engagement of athletes amongst the

gym sport organisations because of the challenging environment created by the current frameworks, allocated resources, and expectations (Howman et al., 2021).

Representatives of rugby union and football clubs also agreed less with statements about NSO helpfulness related to HP. In comparison, RSO helpfulness perceptions for clubs in these codes was perceived more favourably. This suggests that interaction occurs within this sport from the NSO to the RSO's, who then relay communications and systems to the community sport. While relationships between RSO's and community sport clubs are positive, the relationships between NSO's and community sport clubs are seemingly lacking. In an effort to have effective and efficient systems, collaboration between NSO's and community sport clubs in these codes could be beneficial to the facilitation of HP sport pathways.

In comparison to other sports, cricket and tennis club representatives perceived their RSO's to be helpful with HP pathways. Additionally, their scores for NSO helpfulness were positive. These positive perceptions likely reflect a collaborative and transparent HP system. NZ Cricket's strategic plan highlighted their effort to develop HP strategies, facilities and programmes throughout all levels of their sport (New Zealand Cricket, 2021). Similarly, Tennis New Zealand (TNZ) has built a culture, which focuses on creating strong relationships and athlete focused systems (Tennis New Zealand, 2017). The positive HP perceptions reported by clubs in this research likely reflect the collaborative and transparent relationships between the levels of organization that these sports seem to have prioritised.

By comparing the results of this study with prior research, the factors which contribute to tennis clubs' positive perceptions of NSO/RSO helpfulness can be highlighted. A study in 2010 investigated the impact that inter-organisational relationships have on the strategic capability of TNZ. It emphasised the importance of the adoption of a collaborative approach between the NSOs and the regional sport entities (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). The study found that collaborative changes created a better governing environment due to the two entities having a greater awareness and appreciation of each other. This created better relationships and increased the communication within the organisational structure, resulting in a more effective strategic governing environment (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). The correlation of a collaborative approach to governance and positive community club perceptions

of their national and regional organisations facilitation of HP sport pathways is an important finding, which could be beneficial to the greater NZ sport community.

The sentiments of club representatives in the open-ended questions highlighted the positive influence a good relationship with RSOs and NSOs can have in the provision of HP sport pathways for their members. Also identified was the finding that clubs valued their ability to collaborate with the higher-level sport organisations. However, this is not the case for all clubs. Many club representatives are of the opinion that there is still a divide between the higher-level organisations and their clubs. This results in pathways which are challenging to navigate, where communication is limited and the HP sport pathways are constricting for community sport clubs.

### **5.3 Qualified Coaches**

Clubs that have few if any qualified coaches report prioritising HP sport pathways less. This may be because the club is more competitive, and therefore purposefully allocates resources to high performance. Clubs that had qualified coaches were also more likely to report that HP sport pathways were accessible to their members, in comparison to clubs who had no qualified coaches. This finding suggests that the presence of qualified coaches within community sports clubs is important when providing access to HP sport pathways. Similar to prior arguments regarding prioritisation and allocation of resources, clubs that see value in qualified coaches also see value in the more competitive/elite dimensions of their sport, and providing their members with access to HP sport, and pathways to higher levels of competition.

Qualified coaches are limited amongst community sport clubs and this creates a challenge when clubs seek to provide HP sport pathways to their members. This can often lead to reduced retention of members as they look to progress into the elite level (Misener & Danylchuk, 2009). The use of qualified coaches can help with increasing retention, as the improved level of coaching will grow the reputation of the community sport club.

It was significant that clubs with 2-5% qualified coaches agree that their NSO is helpful with HP sport pathways. Having qualified coaches at community sport clubs may help facilitate communication with NSOs and RSOs. Qualified coaches

who have obtained training established by the RSOs and NSOs would be more familiar with how the higher-level organisations operate. Having this connection would help with the receiving and implementation of systems or policies presented by the NSOs and RSOs on behalf of the community sport clubs.

The connection found here between qualified coaches and HP pathways is supported by research which has found that coaches find qualification programmes beneficial and contributory to the provision of better sport systems (Edwards & Washington, 2013). These programmes not only support their development towards being better equipped to provide for HP athletes, but also improve their ability to network amongst the levels of sport. By earning qualifications from NSO developed programmes, the coaches form relationships that can then benefit the community sport clubs. In turn, this can aid in forming a greater understanding amongst the levels of the sport governance network as evidenced by the significant positive sentiments that clubs with qualified coaches expressed regarding their NSO's (Kidman & Keelty, 2015).

#### **5.4 Supporting Athlete Development**

A common sentiment expressed within the research was that community sport clubs primary contribution to HP sport pathways is the support they provide to athlete development. This is particularly evident in the support of coaches and encouragement of athletes to compete in regional and national competitions. This support also assists athletes to move into clubs better suited to further develop their sporting ability. In addition to preparing them for the physical aspect for higher level sport, it shows the community clubs involvement in focusing on athletes and coaches general wellbeing also. Support such as knowing when to encourage athletes to take the next step in their sporting career, keeping in communication with athletes and making sure the athletes are prepared and resourced to the best of the club's abilities.

Resources, facilities, and management were identified as limiting factors for community sport clubs in their contribution to HP sport pathways. However, this is balanced by a common positive theme of the consistent identification of human resource capacity as a strength. Community sport clubs are predominantly staffed by volunteers (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Although qualification of volunteers may be

lacking for some clubs, the work ethic and experience from volunteers is valued. Sentiments from club representatives in this study positively highlighted this supporting their continued use.

Many community sport clubs promote psychological wellbeing through participation in mental health campaigns run by outside organisations, and by training staff in the provision of mental health support. This training is very beneficial to coaches in particular, as it resources them better to assist athletes (Pierce, 2010). Although the support of psychological wellbeing is not the primary role of community sport clubs, it is an important function which is becoming increasingly important.

Community sport clubs are an integral part of the delivery of sport and wellbeing in New Zealand

### **5.5 Practical Implications of the Research**

This research generated perceptions from a robust sample of community sport club representatives relating to HP sport pathways in New Zealand. Communication differs across the levels of the NZ sport hierarchy with clubs in some sports expressing a need for improvement. The findings also highlighted that effective communication is essential in ensuring a positive culture for athlete development is present in NZ's sport organisations.

The findings from the research also indicate that community sport clubs need more support in building capacity to facilitate HP sport pathways. This research provides NSOs and High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) with insights on where clubs believe support and change is needed. Gymnastics NZ specifically are an organisation within the NZ sport sector which could benefit from a collaborative approach to organisational relationships. It highlights the importance of NSOs and RSOs collaborating and communicating effectively with community sport clubs when making decisions that involve both parties.

Even though community sport clubs are willing to provide better support towards HP sport for their athletes, they seem to lack the capacity to do so. This in turn limits clubs in what they can provide for their members in terms of HP sport opportunities. The creation of better relationships and improvement of communication between the organisational levels, will create more effective

collaborative governance structure (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). This governance and will positively impact community club perceptions of their national and regional organisations and improve HP sport pathway facilitation.

The qualification of coaches has been highlighted as a significant factor in both the facilitation of HP sport pathways and the ease of interaction with RSO's and NSO's. Greater and more affordable provision of training leading to qualifications for community sport club coaches would likely increase the ability of coaches to support athletes into HP sport pathways. Furthermore this would aid in building relationship between the clubs and the higher-level organisations and increase their organisational capacity.

## **5.6 Limitations**

Although the sample size was large, a significant proportion of the clubs did not answer the HP related scaled or open-ended questions. Having a more complete data set would provide more confidence on the insights that have been put forward. Several analyses yielded statistically significant results, but it was less clear where the nuanced group differences exist. Having a larger data set would help with this. Even just understanding why the HP sport related questions were not answered may provide worthwhile insights. For example, community sport club representatives may not have answered the questions due to not understanding the HP sport pathways or their club's role in facilitating them.

The study highlighted the significance of qualified coaches in the facilitation of HP sport pathways. A greater understanding of how this influences the HP sport pathways would have been gained if the term 'qualified' had been defined fully. Understanding the level of nature of coaches' training could be significant. By being trained as part of an approved NSO system, community club coaches would have a better understanding of programmes and systems set out by the higher level organisations. However, this provides a platform for further research into this issue.

## **5.7 Future Research**

The results of this study could be usefully complemented with research on the perceptions of other stakeholders including HPSNZ, the NSOs, and RSOs. By

contrasting these perceptions, a more complete understanding of how the system is perceived would result.

A deeper understanding of community sport clubs HP pathway perceptions could be gained through undertaking interviews with club representatives. The open-ended items provided valuable information, but interviews would allow the community sport club representatives to provide an in-depth perspective and allow them more freedom to express their views on HP sport pathways.

Gaining the perceptions of the coaches on HP sport pathways would provide another valuable source of information. This future research should also include an understanding of the level of their training, and if they were trained via NSO, or RSO, run programmes. The current study highlighted the significance of qualified coaches to the facilitation of HP pathways. The coaches' contribution to HP sport pathways is valued by community sport clubs, therefore gaining the coaches' views on the importance of qualifications, clubs capacity to provide HP sport, and relationships with RSOs and NSOs would be significant to this area of research. Currently the term qualified is too broad, with no clarity on what a qualified coach is. A greater understanding of how this influences the HP sport pathways could be gained if the term qualified is fully defined. An increased ability of coaches to communicate with RSOs and NSO's if they have received training from them, could give insight into the communication and collaboration between the levels of sport.

The success of the current HP sport pathway system could also be investigated by measuring how the current international success corresponds with the findings of this research, providing more information about what contributes to developing successful athletes. Awareness of the outcomes of the HP sport pathways will provide a deeper understanding of whether the success is linked to the positive perceptions of this study.

In conclusion, this study focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the community sport clubs perceptions on HP sport pathways. The findings highlighted the importance of good communication and collaboration between all levels of sport organisation. The qualification of coaches was seen as beneficial to facilitating improved collaboration between the different organisational levels in NZ sport. This

study will be useful in providing a platform for further research in this area to further benefit all levels of sport in New Zealand.

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